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**May 2008
E-Newsletter**

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THE BIRTH OF A BLOG, AND BEER TAX PROTESTERS

In the coming weeks, there will be a new addition to this website: My blog. I'll give my take on the events and issues confronting our state. But I also want your comments and questions. The most interesting and cogent comments will appear on the website, too.

Lately, I've been getting a lot of mail – most of it from outside Assembly District 24 and some from outside the state – about my proposal to increase the excise tax on beer. The revenue generated by the tax will be used exclusively to pay for alcohol-related health, law enforcement, and prevention and treatment costs.

The tax would also reduce incidences of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, the leading preventable cause of birth defects. The lifetime costs for treating a person with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome can exceed \$2 million for medical care, special education, residential care, and productivity losses.

In response to the growing interest about the beer tax, we have set up a [survey and comment webpage](#) so that people can give us their opinion.

The other day, I met a group of college students – who said they were Republicans – at my district office in downtown San Jose. These students were staging a protest against the proposed beer tax. One protester held up a sign that read, "No Taxation Without Intoxication."

Their ringleader, a 21-year-old San Francisco State University student who identified himself as Leigh Wolf sat down with me in my office to discuss the proposed tax. A reporter from a local

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weekly tabloid and one of my staffers also attended this meeting.

Mr. Wolf said the tax would adversely affect college students who rely on beer for relaxation. He said he opposed the proposed tax despite the fact that some of his family members suffered from alcoholism. A *San Francisco Chronicle* journalist covering the protest later reported Wolf saying "some of his fellow students spend as much as 60 percent of their paychecks on beer."

The student made his point. But this meeting actually bolstered my beliefs on why the excise tax ought to be raised.

Study after study indicates that raising the beer excise tax cuts consumption. Would increasing the tax have stopped this student's family members from becoming alcoholics? Perhaps. Would raising the tax have hurt them? No.

Beer, by far, represents the lion's share of the alcohol market. It is the preferred alcoholic beverage of choice for under-age drinkers because of its inexpensive cost.

The majority of college undergraduates are younger than 21 and cannot legally drink alcohol. About 700,000 college students each year are assaulted by another student who has been drinking. And if Mr. Wolf's account that some college students are spending two-thirds of their wages on beer is true, I say this is a paradigm that needs to be changed.

First, I am worried for those students' wellbeing. Under my proposal, revenue from the tax would be earmarked for prevention and intervention programs to steer drinkers away from alcoholism.

Second, spending that much of their precious money on alcohol makes no sense in a world where the price of gas and food is skyrocketing.

My bill is simply a sensible approach to a serious problem.

COPING WITH THE RISING COST OF FOOD

The sharp increase in food prices adds another problem for families who are coping with rising unemployment, medical costs, and the soaring cost of gas. They need help in putting food on the table.

My bill -- Assembly Bill 433 -- will make food stamps more accessible to eligible families by eliminating unnecessary

administrative paperwork. If passed, AB 433 would allow many Medi-Cal participants to become categorically eligible for food stamps by eliminating asset information as a criterion. Only their incomes would be used for eligibility purposes. The federal government provides food stamps and also shares the administrative costs with the counties and the state.

California has one of the lowest food stamp participation rates in the nation. Each year, we lose up to \$2 billion in available federal funds because half of those eligible never apply for food stamps. Passage of AB 433 will help an estimated 80,000 Californians apply for the program. The bill has cleared the Assembly and it is now in the state Senate.

This bill also helps our economy. Research indicates that that each dollar freed up by food stamps generates \$1.84 in economic activity.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING WEEK

Silicon Valley marks Affordable Housing Week from May 13-17 with activities that underscore the challenges we face in creating a balanced mix of affordable housing – from rentals to single-family homes. These housing options can then serve a wide range of consumers who range from extremely low-income families to first-time buyers.

Join us to celebrate the remarkable successes we've achieved in Santa Clara County. The week's events include rental fairs, first time homebuyer education, a Habitat for Humanity Build Day, a briefing on homeless issues in Santa Clara County, and a bus tour of an affordable housing project.

On Saturday, May 17, my office is holding an Affordable Housing Fair with workshops on how to save for a house, and how to prevent foreclosure. The fair is scheduled from 10 a.m. to noon at Trinity Presbyterian Church, 3151 Union Ave., San Jose.

Another facet to the high cost of housing in Silicon Valley is homelessness. Next month, our newsletter will include more information about how local officials are developing a plan to fight homelessness and what you can do.

For more information regarding Affordable Housing Week visit <http://www.affordablehousingweek.org/>.

UPCOMING EVENTS

BUDGET TOWN HALL MEETING
Thursday, June 5
4 p.m. to 6 p.m.
Center for Employment Training
701 Vine St.
San Jose

California faces a budget crisis that threatens our educational system and the safety net for our poor, the elderly, and people with disabilities. Come to the town hall meeting and tell us how this crisis should be handled and we will provide you with the tools to persuade key decision-makers in Sacramento! Bring your relatives, friends, and co-workers to this important meeting. I am hosting this meeting along with my colleagues, Assemblymembers Joe Coto, Sally Lieber, Ira Ruskin, and Alberto Torrico.

To RSVP or for more information, [click here](#).